

# Meth Addicts' Re-Entry Into Community Is Vital

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Sheriff Luce, Commissioner Donahue, and State Rep. Troy Woodruff.

**Photo: Courtesy of Kevin J. Kilmer.**

"It's hard enough getting a new start with a felony conviction. It's the scarlet letter of life. But if the community gives their support, these offenders stand a much better chance."

J. David Donahue, Commissioner



KCSD Inmate Workforce

(click for larger image)

Over 50 Knox County residents packed into the auditorium at Vincennes University's Technology

Building Thursday to hear what is being done on the state level to quell the methamphetamine problem, and what they can do to help.

The answer, according to J. David Donahue, Commissioner of the Indiana Department of Correction, is to keep inmates from repeating criminal activity by accepting them back into the community through a process called "re-entry."

"I've got a lot of folks who want to change their behavior," said Donahue. "But they can't do that if they're not being accepted back into their communities."

Donahue's visit was part of the Knox County Sheriff's Department's series of community regarding methamphetamine and associated problems.

Donahue said the IDOC has implemented, and is in the process of implementing, several initiatives to promote smooth reassimilation for inmates.

Among those initiatives are meth treatment units within the prisons. The units are designed to address the issue of addiction and to help inmates recover from substance abuse. Donahue said there are three Indiana facilities with operating units, one of them at the Wabash Valley Correctional Facility in Carlisle.

However, he added that three units are far from enough. Of the 24,000 inmates currently housed in the IDOC, 18,000 are in for substance abuse-related crimes. The IDOC is in the process of introducing the units in six more Indiana prisons by July 6, 2006.

The IDOC is also working with the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles to train state employees to issue licenses for eligible inmates who are close to being released.

The effort, Donahue said, is designed to make it easier for the inmates to find a job after leaving prison.

"We let these people go out into the world with nothing but a check and a document saying that they were recently released from prison," said Donahue. "How do we expect them to get started if they can't even cash the check without proper identification?"

In addition, the IDOC is also working with the BMV to implement a program for inmates to acquire their CDL licenses while in jail. This would make it possible for them to get a job as a truck driver after leaving prison.

Donahue acknowledged that the plan is not without its flaws, but he remains optimistic. "There will be certain cargo the inmates will not be allowed to haul, and not all of them will be eligible," he said. "But the ones who are will have a chance to make a good living for themselves when they get out."

The state has also started a Web site for released inmates - [www.reentry.in.gov](http://www.reentry.in.gov). The site is designed to

invoke interaction between the community and released inmates.

"Community businesses can register on the Web site to post job opportunities for the inmates," said Donahue. He added that businesses that hire recently released inmates may be eligible for sizable tax breaks.

The recent initiatives were prompted by a recent study of the IDOC's recidivism rate (the amount of inmates who are being released only to re-enter the system shortly thereafter).

"Since 2001, the IDOC has had a recidivism rate of 40 percent," Donahue said. "That means four out of 10 inmates are coming back through the system."

The IDOC houses approximately 25,000 inmates statewide, and operates on a budget of \$1.2 billion of tax funding every 24 months. By the year 2007, 14,000 of those inmates will go free.

"It's important to know what you're getting for your money," Donahue said. "And if we send these inmates back to the communities with no support or assistance, the odds are against them."

Terry L. Jenkins, the Knox County Jail's mental health officer, supported the state's initiatives. "It's the right thing to do," said Jenkins. "Accepting the people back into the community is significant to their recovery."

Sheriff Steve Luce also praised the state's efforts, saying that the IDOC has been instrumental in the effort to educate Knox County on the meth problem. "We've got to work together," said Luce. "What's happening here and what's happening on the state level are all relevant."

"Showing our support for these inmates on all levels is part of their therapy. They need to feel comfortable going out into the community again."

Donahue added. "It's hard enough getting a new start with a felony conviction. It's the scarlet letter of life. But if the community gives their support, these offenders stand a much better chance."

### **About the Department of Correction**

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department's home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department's Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.